TITLE: EFFECT OF DOWNSTALK LEAF REMOVAL ON YIELD AND QUALITY OF DARK AIR-CURED TOBACCO

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ABSTRACT: In recent years the market demand for poor quality, lower stalk grades of dark fire-cured and dark air-cured tobacco types has decreased significantly. A study was conducted to determine if the quality of dark air-cured tobacco could be improved without yield reduction by removing lower leaves before harvest. Treatments were the removal of 2 and 4 leaves at topping, 1 week after topping, and 2 weeks after topping. Plots which had no leaves removed and plots from which poor quality leaves were discarded at stripping were used as controls. Removal of 2 or 4 leaves before harvest gave a decrease in low quality lug grade tobacco and a corresponding increase in higher quality leaf grade tobacco. However, the yield of lug grade tobacco was significantly decreased only in plots where low quality leaves were discarded at stripping. No yield reductions were detected in plots having 2 or 4 leaves removed at topping or 1 week after topping; the removal of leaves 2 weeks after topping gave a decrease in overall yield. Highest total yields were obtained in plots having 2 leaves removed at topping or 1 week after topping; lowest yields were measured in plots having 4 leaves removed 2 weeks after topping or objectionable leaves discarded at stripping. None of the treatments significantly increased the dollar per acre value over that of the control plots in which no leaves were removed.

REVIEW: The study summarized above dealt mainly with Green River air-cured tobacco. A time period of four weeks after topping was needed to allow the growth of the compensating leaves. Removal of these lower leaves did improve the quality of the stalk; however, the middle leaves then became the lower leaves and were more exposed to the environment. The authors concluded that there was no economic gain for the farmer to remove any leaves.

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